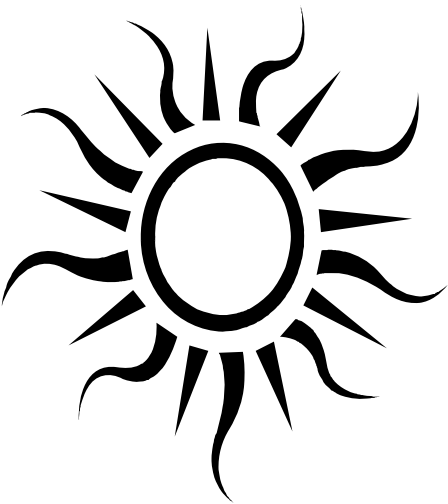


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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, November 22, 2006

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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November 22, 2006

Michigan must end its neglect of foster children

Governor should restore funding and staff to foster care agency

The Detroit News

Michigan continues to fail its most vulnerable children through mismanagement and official neglect.

As The Detroit News reported Tuesday, the state's foster care system is dangerously overloaded. The foster care system is spread so thin that it cannot say with confidence that all of the children entrusted to its care are in safe environments. Nor can it adequately assure the public that it has the resources to appropriately intervene when abuse is suspected.

The caseload of foster children has swelled to 19,000 today from just more than 14,000 in 1987. But the number of foster families has remained roughly the same. And the number of state caseworkers to support those children has dropped about 10 percent in the last two years.

That means foster parents are responsible for more kids with less support from professional staff.

The state should have seen this as a recipe for tragedy. And indeed, 103 foster children have died since 2004.

The state lists abuse as the cause of four of those deaths. But many of the others are listed as accidents or suicides. Who can say for certain what role deficiencies in foster home monitoring played in those deaths?

This is a problem that must be fixed immediately.

The children in the foster care system are Gov. Jennifer Granholm's responsibility, and she has neglected them.

Funding for programs intended to prevent child abuse have been slashed under her watch. For example, the funding for Families First, which provides parenting skills and other support to families at risk, has been cut 17 percent. That left more than 1,000 families without the help they needed.

After some highly publicized deaths of abused foster children, the state began conducting more thorough background checks of foster families and doubled the training they received.

But more is needed.

The governor must move more money into the foster care budget to cultivate more foster families, hire more caseworkers and put in place better oversight procedures.

It is not a problem that can wait for better financial times. Certainly, the state budget is tight, with new deficits projected.

But protecting children should have the first claim on tax dollars.

With current resources, Michigan can't meet its responsibility to the children in the foster care system. The governor must shift funds from other areas to give the foster care system the resources it needs to protect the children in its care.

Other programs and priorities may suffer. But we can't think of another part of the state budget that should be given a higher priority than those programs responsible for keeping children safe.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Taking away from at-risk children

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

Mahatma Gandhi once observed that a society is judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

A couple of newspaper stories on Tuesday -- one in the Kalamazoo Gazette, the other in The Detroit News -- make us wonder how we'll be judged based on how we treat children, especially poor children and abused and neglected children.

The Gazette reported that Kalamazoo County Head Start, the federally funded program for pre-school children in low-income homes, has taken a funding hit and has cut back the number of days a week it is offered.

Head Start advocates argue that the program's benefits to society far outweigh its costs.

Consider, for example, that participants in the program are more likely to graduate from high school, have higher incomes and are less likely to be charged with crimes than children from similar backgrounds who did not participate.

Cutting back on this nation's investment in children from poor families could be a costly mistake down the road.

On the same day, The Detroit News reported that Michigan's foster care system is overloaded and underfunded, and that fewer workers are doing more work. The safety of children in foster care is being jeopardized by reduced oversight.

According to The News, the number of children in state foster care has grown 31 percent over the last 20 years, while the number of foster homes has stayed approximately the same. In addition, the number of state foster care case workers has declined over the last two years.

Meanwhile, federal and state budgets are strapped and Michigan's economy continues to shed jobs. There just isn't enough money to fund all the programs that government used to underwrite.

Last month, National Head Start Association President Sarah Greene said: "It is a shame to see that those responsible for educating America's most at-risk children are being asked to make the kind of personal financial sacrifices that would never be asked of a worker for a defense department contractor."

Trying to balance budgets on the backs of poor, neglected or abused children is an indication that priorities are way out of whack.

Let's rethink those priorities on behalf of society's most vulnerable members -- for the sake of everyone's future.

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Deal set in death of baby

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Scott Hagen

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A case spinning toward a possible hung jury and mistrial ended abruptly Tuesday when a Jackson man accused of shaking a month-old baby to death pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter.

Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates and defense attorney Jerry Engle -- with indications that the jury couldn't reach a conclusion -- struck the deal as the 12-member group was in its sixth hour of deliberation.

After the plea, David Monroe, 26, stood in Circuit Judge Charles Nelson's court and said he shook Jaylan Monroe-Romer two or three times. Jaylan, the daughter of his girlfriend, Tomi Romer, was not Monroe's biological child.

As Monroe was led out of court in shackles he turned to Engle, shook his hand and said "Thank you very much."

Monroe is scheduled to be sentenced Dec. 27 and faces up to 15 years in prison.

One juror, Janice Stevens, said the jury had dismissed second-degree murder and first-degree child abuse -- the two charges that combined would have equaled a mandatory life sentence -- but would have found Monroe guilty of second-degree child abuse. The problem, she said, was that the jury could not decide on voluntary manslaughter; it was not given the option of involuntary manslaughter.

"Everybody was thinking different things," she said after the trial's conclusion. "We just couldn't agree. ! We didn't figure he did it deliberately."

An hour before the plea agreement was struck, the jury asked Nelson for a definition of "knowingly." Both second-degree murder and first- and second-degree child abuse charges state that the defendant must "knowingly" perform an act that is either likely to result in death, great bodily harm or serious injury to the child.

That's a difficult assignment for a jury to decide, Bates said, because it is asking 12 people to go inside the head of a defendant and determine intent.

"I do not have a problem with this because I understand what the jury gets hung up on," she said of the jury's task. "Based on Mr. Monroe's statement, I believe that he did not have the intent to kill, which would probably result in manslaughter."

Engle's closing statement portrayed Monroe as a frustrated, broke, sick father who made a mistake.

He said Monroe, who cared for his own three children on weekends and took care of Tomi Romer's two kids throughout the week, made only \$600 a month and suffered from brain aneurysms and severe migraines. Romer testified in court that she never saw Monroe act violently.

"I am very pleased, and I think the rest of them are, too," Stevens said of her fellow jurors. "They knew he was guilty and didn't want him to go free, but they also knew that some of those charges were too severe for what he actually did. ! Somebody should make sure that baby didn't die for nothing."

Engle, too, was pleased with the plea agreement and thought the involuntary manslaughter plea fit the act.

"Clients I represent who have some conscience about what occurred oftentimes would just as soon be found guilty of something," Engle said. "I think it helps clear their conscience in the long run."

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Man's fate in jury's hands

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

By Scott Hagen

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A jury will decide what they believe was in David Monroe's head when he shook a 4-week-old baby who later died.

Closing arguments in the murder trial for Monroe, of Jackson, finished Monday after a jury heard five witnesses for the prosecution. The defense offered no witnesses. The jury continued deliberations this morning.

Testimony revealed that on April 25, Monroe was helping his girlfriend, Tomi Romer. Jaylan Monroe-Romer -- who shared Monroe's surname but wasn't his biological daughter -- had soiled her diaper that night, and Monroe, 26, offered to give the infant a bath. Tomi drifted off to sleep.

She awoke to Monroe nudging her and telling her something was wrong. Jaylan wasn't breathing right, had lost color in her face, and wouldn't open her eyes, Romer testified.

Police first questioned the couple at Foote Hospital. Monroe said he had put Jaylan to sleep in a crib and checked on her later to find her struggling to breathe.

Jaylan was flown to University of Michigan Hospital

in Ann Arbor in critical condition. Jackson police detectives, suspicious that Jaylan had been shaken, questioned Monroe again.

Monroe started the interview with Detective Dean Schuette by declaring, "I have never shaken the baby." Then, he said, "I did not shake her hard." Later, he said he shook her three or four times because he was frustrated when she wouldn't stop crying.

"I didn't know what was wrong with her," the jury heard Monroe say on his taped interview. "I just wanted her to settle down."

Jaylan died on her one-month birthday.

Two doctors testified she died of shaken baby syndrome.

"The best way I can explain it is if a stranger saw that kind of shaking, they would know it was the wrong thing to do," said Dr. Leena Dev, a child abuse expert at UM hospital.

In closing, defense attorney Jerry Engle offered the jury a glimpse into Monroe's frustrating life.

He has three children of his own and was helping Romer take care of her two children. He suffered from brain aneurysms and severe migraines, and received a pittance in disability from the government because he couldn't work, Engle said.

"For starters, he must have been flat broke. Maybe I've been lucky ! but I can't imagine living on \$600 a month," Engle said. "I think it all got to be too much for him."

Prosecutor Allison Bates, however, said Monroe knew that shaking the baby would result in injury since he has children of his own.

"It's not a mistake, it's not an accident," Bates said during closing.

If a jury returns a guilty verdict of first-degree child abuse and second-degree murder -- felony murder -- Monroe faces a mandatory life sentence. The jury could also return verdicts for manslaughter or any degree of child abuse.

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Rose Kelley case brings shame to all

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MUNDY TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Melissa Poyorena

JOURNAL READER

I am ashamed at the possible sentencing for the parents of Rose Kelley. In your article on Nov. 2 ["Rose's parents enter plea, face Dec. 14 sentencing," Local News, Page A3], it was stated they may receive up to 17 months for their deliberate neglect. Months? What about years?

In the same edition, an article ["Swartz Creek man held on child porn charges," Local News, Page A4] stated this man was held on \$785,000 bond, while Rose's parents were free on a \$10,000 personal bond. He also faces a maximum 20-year sentence. Now, if child porn carries a punishment this severe, shouldn't the deliberate neglect of a child's parents carry a punishment a little more severe?

As if this was not bad enough, the same edition carried another article ["Man arraigned in theft of cows," Local News, Page A9] in which a man was held on \$20,000 bond for stealing three cows. He could face up to 5 years in prison. Rose's childhood and life were stolen from her. How much more important should her life be than that of a cow?

To top it all off, in "Your Views" of the same edition, a reader praised Genesee Probate Judge Robert E. Weiss (the judge mentioned in the above article about Rose's parents) for the job he has done ["Weiss should stay in office," Page A14].

It may be too late for Rose to have an advocate, but let's not be guilty of neglect for the rest of the children in our world who need an advocate. Shame on her parents. Shame on protective services. Shame on our court. Shame on us for not being involved in protecting our children.

Melissa Poyorena

Mundy Township

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Wednesday, November 22, 2006

Detroit News Letters to the Editor

Growing immorality

The problem is NOT that the government did not do right by young Ricky Holland; rather the problem is that the young boy was in the system to begin with. An unwed mother putting her child up for adoption is nothing new; however, the number of children born out of wedlock is an alarming trend that reflects the growing immorality in our society. Whatever happened to people being responsible for their own behaviors?

Richard Galbraith
Oxford



Man's arrest spurs more girls to make accusations

SWARTZ CREEK

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Robyn Rosenthal

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SWARTZ CREEK - Word spread fast of Eric Garland's arrest last month on charges that he sexually assaulted a 13-year-old Swartz Creek girl.

As it did, the list of his alleged victims grew almost as quickly.

"His arrest in Swartz Creek got friends of family starting to talk," said Redford police Officer Eric Norman. "They started questioning their children."

About a day after Garland's arrest Oct. 11 in Elms Park, two girls in Redford came forward within hours of each other.

Garland now has been charged with five counts there, including three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He also has been charged with first-degree CSC in the Swartz Creek case and has been arrested on similar charges in Durand.

Garland, who lived in Durand and in Redford, is being held in the Genesee County Jail.

"He potentially is a very dangerous person with the way he was going," Norman said. "The community is much safer with him where he's at."

Garland, 36, was arrested Oct. 11 by Swartz Creek police while parked with the girl at the park about 11 p.m.

His arrest was by happenstance - or the answer to a prayer.

"She (the 13-year-old girl) said she was sitting there praying to God someone would come along, and then I shined my lights on them," said Swartz Creek Officer Ken Monroe, who made the arrest. "It made my hair stand up."

Monroe was parked in the back of Elms Park about 11 p.m. when Garland drove into the park with the girl in a small sport-utility vehicle.

"It's not an uncommon thing to have parkers back here," Monroe said. "I thought they'd see me and leave."

But as Monroe inched toward Garland's vehicle, it never moved. When he approached Garland, his actions immediately unleashed suspicions.

Those suspicions cemented when he saw the girl.

"She looked absolutely terrified," he said. "There was a look of scared, and relief because I was there."

After Garland's arrest, and as news spread among families he befriended, more alleged victims came forward.

"It was the triggering event," Shiawassee County Assistant Prosecutor Sara Edwards said of the Swartz Creek arrest.

Swartz Creek Police Chief Rick Clolinger applauded Monroe for his police work.

"The impact this has, not only on this victim but other victims, is huge," he said. "I'm proud my guy was there to take him down. It was very good police work, no question about it. It opened up a big investigation by a lot of agencies."

Norman said the alleged incidents in Redford, involving girls ages 8 and 16, occurred this fall. The victims are not related to one another.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Michael Woodyard, assigned to the office's child abuse unit, said Garland is accused of putting a camera in the home of the 16-year-old girl, who was 15 at the time of the incident. The camera was used to secretly tape the girl getting out of the shower, Woodyard said.

The Durand charges involve the 8-year-old Redford girl, who was living in Durand between July 2005 and March 2006, when the assaults allegedly occurred, Edwards said.

Garland is expected to undergo psychiatric examination in the Swartz Creek case to determine whether he is competent for trial.

"My concern in talking with him is whether he has a true grasp of the events that took place and the process," said attorney Barry A. Wolf, who is representing Garland in the Swartz Creek case. Wolf would not comment further.

Norman said the families of the victims he's spoken with hadn't suspected any abuse and likely wouldn't have learned about it if not for Garland's arrest in Swartz Creek.

"The folks I talked to were definitely caught off guard. They couldn't believe it," Norman said. "This is a case that no one would know if it wasn't for the (Swartz Creek) arrest."

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Burton man faces child porn charges

BURTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Kim Crawford

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BURTON - A 44-year-old husband and father from Burton was arraigned Tuesday on 18 criminal counts, including charges related to child pornography and photographing unsuspecting victims.

Cary M. Curtis was arraigned before Burton District Judge Richard L. Hughes, who set full-cash bonds totaling \$147,000. In lieu of posting that bond, Curtis was held in the Genesee County Jail.

"In addition to the pictures of child porn he had, some of the pictures on his computer were images of kids from the neighborhood and a woman from his place of work," said Detective Matt Bade of the Burton Police Department. "Yet no one we've talked with in the course of this investigation knew they were being photographed."

Curtis had been advised through his attorney that investigators had a warrant for his arrest, so he turned himself in at the district court in downtown Flint to be arraigned. He was then taken to jail.

Genesee County Assistant Prosecutor Gladys Christopherson said when Burton police seized Curtis's computer and various discs and tapes, they found thousands of child pornography images. The investigation revealed that Curtis also had pictures that were taken up the skirts or dresses of girls and women without their knowledge, she said.

Curtis is charged with six counts of possession of child sexually abusive material; nine counts of using a computer to commit a crime; one count of making or producing child sexually abusive material; and two counts of capturing or distributing an image of an unclothed person.

He faces a preliminary examination on the charges in Central District Court next month.

Bade said the case began in August when one of Curtis's children discovered pictures of child pornography on their family's computer. Family members notified police, who got a search warrant and seized the computer as well as discs and videotapes.

If convicted on the most serious charges, Curtis could be sentenced to as many as 20 years in prison.

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Man accused of child porn gets mental exam

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Paul Janczewski

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A Swartz Creek man being held on 32 charges related to child pornography faces a forensic examination at a state facility.

James M. Houck, 38, will be examined at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry near Ann Arbor to determine if he is competent for trial.

Attorney David I. Megdell, representing Houck, told a judge the evaluation is necessary because Houck told him he was "in a blur" and has no recollection of when he allegedly downloaded more than 100,000 images of child pornography onto his computer.

Megdell said his client is bipolar and on medications.

Central District Judge Richard L. Hughes approved the motion and scheduled a Jan. 23 pretrial.

Police and prosecutors said Houck used his computer to manufacture and possess child pornography. Of the 32 charges, 29 are 20-year felonies. The remaining two are 4- and 7-year felonies.

Houck, who lives in the basement of his mother's home and is reportedly unemployed, was held in the Genesee County Jail in lieu of \$785,000 bond.

The case began in May 2005 when the mother of a girl who had been visiting Houck at his home alone called and asked police to investigate what was going on there, police said.

Police learned that Houck's niece and three of her girlfriends, all young teens, also had been going to the house.

Police searched the basement and found video equipment, a computer and 64 CDs. A forensic search of the computer yielded 106,000 child pornographic photographs, investigators said.

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November 22, 2006

235 kids find homes

On National Adoption Day, Michigan is tops

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Stephanie Lynn Guthrie got a Nintendo hand-held game for her 11th birthday this week, but her greatest gift was a place to call home. Stephanie was adopted Tuesday by her uncle, Joseph Jaskulski of Taylor, during a statewide celebration of National Adoption Day. Local families adopted 235 children in 36 courtrooms, making Michigan the nation's top state for the number of places where adoption celebrations were held.

In a Wayne County courtroom decorated with balloons, Stephanie stood before Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly and said she wanted Jaskulski to be her legal guardian.

"I know he'll always take care of me. I have someone I can always look up to and he will love me forever and ever," Stephanie said.

Michigan began participating four years ago in National Adoption Day, held around Thanksgiving every year in most states.

"This is something that is very important to the families," said Cynthia Billey, coordinator of National Adoption Day. "But it helps raise awareness that there are kids right in your community that need a home."

Tuesday's celebrations included some children who were adopted from overseas, but the majority of the adopted children came from the state's foster care system.

Children enter the foster system after investigators determine they have been a victim of neglect or abuse. Though state officials work to reunite parents with their children, that is not always possible because some parents lose their rights to their children, making them available for adoption.

National Adoption Day was a reminder that 6,200 children are waiting to be adopted, according to Kirsta Grapentine of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. Approximately 90 percent of those will get adopted by their foster parents or relatives, Grapentine said, but 300-600 children are still looking for a permanent home at any time.

Among the adoptive parents on Tuesday were Willie and LaVerne Young, a Detroit couple in their 60s who have already raised their own five children. They decided to adopt their grandchildren, Shawna, 3, and Jasmine, 1 1/2, after state officials removed them from their daughter's home.

"I didn't want them to be in foster care when we can take care of them," said Willie Young.

Other couples were like Linda and Matt Wells, who are unable to have their own children. A year and a half ago, the Woodhaven couple became foster parents to Miranda, 4, and Michael, 3. On Tuesday, the Wells adopted the siblings. The couple considered going overseas but then decided to look locally.

Want to adopt?

You can be single or married.

You can either rent or own a home, but you must have adequate bedroom space for each child adopted.

You don't have to become a foster parent first.

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange can help prospective adoptive parents. Call (800) 589-6273 or go to its Web site at

<http://www.mare.org>.

Costs

There is no fee to adopt a child from the foster care system. Prospective parents are responsible for court costs, however.

Adoption fees for an international adoption can range from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Source: Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange

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Wayne County Celebrates National Adoption Day

November is National Adoption Month, but Tuesday was the fourth annual National Adoption Day in Wayne County and many adoptions were finalized, Local 4 reported.

National Adoption Day, created six years ago, is a national effort to raise awareness of children in foster care who are waiting to find permanent families, according to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

For more information on adoption, go to the [Department of Human Services Web site](#).

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Kids get new parents during Adoption Day court session

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Ken Palmer

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GENESEE COUNTY - Three-year-old Angel went into court Tuesday and emerged with a new name and new parents.

It was no big deal for Angel, renamed Sarah Marie Vecellio. Her new parents are also Grandma and Grandpa, who have cared for her since she was 10 months old.

As for the name, she told a court worker it was OK to change it to Sarah because she was "everybody's angel, anyway."

"I'm just so (happy) to take care of her and get her out of the situation she was in," said Christine Vecellio. "She's brought a lot of joy to our lives."

Vecellio and her husband, Ron, were among six families who reached the adoption finish line Tuesday in Genesee County Probate Court, where the normally private hearings were made public as part of Michigan Adoption Day.

In fiscal 2005, more than 2,880 Michigan children with special needs were adopted, according to the state Department of Human Services. This year, more than 4,400 children were awaiting adoption, including many with special needs tied to abuse or neglect, the DHS said.

In Genesee County, 219 permanent state wards were adopted in 2005, court officials said. There were 64 adoptions by step-parents and 25 adoptions by relatives.

On Tuesday, Genesee Probate Judge Jennie E. Barkey - flanked by "assistant judges" Haleigh Bauer, 10, and Destiny Allen, 12 - finalized several adoptions by relatives, one by unrelated foster parents and one adult adoption.

Amanda Childs, 19, was adopted by her stepfather, Gregory Childs, who has lived with her and her mother, Ann Marie Childs, since Amanda was 7.

"It was her idea," Ann Marie Childs said. "I'm so honored that my choice was her choice, too."

Antonio, 4, and India, 3, were adopted by Carolyn Abron, a great-aunt who had already raised three relatives' children.

Alyssa Morris, 13, whose mother died of cancer in 1997, was adopted by her uncle, James Morris, who had been trying to adopt her for years, Barkey said.

"He was able to keep a promise he made to his sister," the judge said.

Tuesday's hearing was the happy ending in a process that often is long and complex. Parents undergo home studies, criminal background checks and other evaluations before they are allowed to adopt.

"You have to go through all the hoops to convince people you're real," Barkey said. "We can't help what happens to people before they come to us. But we need to do everything we can to make sure that it doesn't happen again."

Many people who would consider adopting a child don't realize they are eligible, Barkey and other court officials said. Single parents are eligible, and cross-racial adoptions are permissible, they said.

"There's a real need for adoptive parents," Barkey said. "There are lots and lots of kids out there who need to be adopted."

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'She is our bright light' Woman adopts 1-year-old girl

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Steven Hepker

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Flanked by two beautiful daughters, Sherri Hanna added a third Tuesday during the fourth annual Michigan Adoption Day.

"You are officially Kara Grace Renee Hanna," Jackson County Probate Judge Susan Vandercook declared as the 1-year-old danced and squealed on the counsel table.

Assisting Vandercook was Michigan Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman, whose fellow justices spread across the state to promote adoptions.

More than 1,100 children have been adopted statewide in the four adoption days.

"This is one of the very few nice things that happen in a courtroom," Markman said. "This is a wonderful occasion."

Vandercook, who will retire at the end of the year, wore her adoption robe decorated with zoo animals.

"It is nice we can all be a part of this," she said, noting Kara was the youngest child of a half dozen adopted before her or Circuit Judge John McBain on Tuesday.

Hanna raised her daughters, Ashli and Alyssa, after divorcing when they were little. She has been a foster mother to toddlers and infants for four or five years.

"I love babies. I love children," she said.

Kara arrived a year ago to the Hanna household and turned 1 on Oct. 27. She seemed to celebrate along with the courtroom Tuesday, constantly clapping and dancing in her jean dress, pink sweater and patent leather shoes.

"We have been through a lot in the last few years with illnesses and deaths," Hanna said. "She is our bright light."

Little detail was offered about her background, except that she apparently is lucky to be healthy and in a good home. She was placed in foster care as part of an abuse-and-neglect case.

"She might not have lived but for the Hanna family," Hanna's friend, Debbi VanMeer, told the court. "She has a precious, supportive, grateful family in which to grow up."

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Forming a family Kids, mom off to new start on Michigan Adoption Day

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

By Lynn Turner

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“My name is Suzann Ready-McDonald, but it's going to be Suzann Rangel,” the 8-year-old girl with the 100-watt smile tells a Kalamazoo County Probate Court judge on Tuesday before burying her head in her hands, overcome with shyness.

Judge Curtis J. Bell smiles and welcomes Suzann and her three siblings, Charles, 11; Nichole, 9; and James, 6, to court on this very special day -- Michigan Adoption Day. The four are getting new names and a new mom.

As the proceedings move forward, Kathy Rangel, of Kalamazoo Township, formally requests to adopt the siblings, “because I love these children to pieces, and we're a family.”

Rangel's sister, Jackie Craft, seconds the motion. The children's Family & Children Services caseworker, Nancy Mitchell, supports the plan.

“I've been working with them since January, but they've been a family for a lot longer than that,” Mitchell says.

Mitchell recounts to Bell and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan that she helped Suzann write a name tag earlier. About her new last name, Mitchell recounts, Suzann had said, “You spell it R-Angel.”

Adoption is about making “a forever family,” Corrigan says. “That's what all this legal mumbo-jumbo is about: To make these children part of the forever ‘R-Angel’ family.”

Suzann's smile grows even brighter as Corrigan announces the completion of the adoption. Nichole applauds, and the boys smile. Mom jumps up and kisses her kids, as friends, family and supporters in the back of the courtroom clap and take pictures.

The four new Rangels are among 21 children adopted Tuesday by 10 families in Kalamazoo County, officials say. Across the state, 36 counties took part in Adoption Day, with a total of 235 adoptions finalized.

Adoption Day was created as a way to raise awareness about adoption, the 4,400 children in Michigan awaiting adoption and the 19,000 in foster care, said Corrigan, who took part in adoption hearings in Wayne County on Tuesday morning before driving west for the afternoon's procedures. It's also meant as a way of dispelling myths surrounding adoption and promoting possibilities.

Promoted to Mom

The new reality for Rangel is that that she's been promoted. Before Tuesday, the kids called her ``Aunt Kathy."

``Now we can call her Mom," Suzann says.

Walking into J.C. Penney for a new family portrait after the adoption, Rangel, 49, beams as she says, ``Here we are -- the family!"

For the first time since the kids were placed with her on Aug. 8, 2004, the holiday card they send out this season will be signed ``The Rangels."

The new family, which includes Rangel's youngest son, Bradley, 12, lives on Kalamazoo's east side. Rangel, 49, also has a grown son, Michael, living with his own family in New Mexico.

Asked how it felt to have a brand-new bunch of brothers and sisters, Bradley shrugs.

``It's not very different," he says. ``They've been with us for so long."

Forming a new family

It wasn't in Rangel's plan to take on a new brood of kids.

Recently retired after 22 years in the Army, where she was a sergeant first class handling personnel, she moved with Bradley back to Kalamazoo, her hometown, where her mother and siblings live. She planned to work part time and travel.

But one of her sisters, the children's biological mother, developed a drug problem, was sent to prison and had her parental rights terminated.

Rangel became the children's foster parent.

``Thank God I have the means," she says of being able to support the kids. ``Thank God I retired. I bought a house; it was big enough for all of them. (I have) a van with built-in car seats. It's like everything is for a reason.

``Before the kids came, I talked to (Bradley) about the fact there would be a lot of changes. ... We asked, `What would God do?'"

Bringing them in

So the kids came home.

``They play so well together," Rangel says of the group. ``They do fight. It's just the brother-and-sister thing."

There are adjustments. Frequently left on their own while their birth mother still had custody, the four siblings get counseling and are being assessed for psychological needs. They have tutors to help with their schoolwork.

“I'm going to have to deal with this for the rest of my life,” Rangel says of the trauma done to them. “I hate it for the kids. It's not fair.

“They're the sweetest kids. They're beautiful. But a lot of that stuff isn't going to go away.”

That's reality, though, and the former Army sergeant is nothing if not pragmatic. She and the kids will do what's necessary, believing God will provide.

“And he does,” she says.

While getting ready for the adoption hearing Tuesday morning, Rangel gave each child an identification bracelet. Each bears the child's name and adoption date -- Nov. 21, 2006 -- the same date that has a big blue box drawn around it on the family calendar.

The bracelets signify family.

The kids, in turn, bought one for Rangel. They give it to her along with a handmade card.

Inside the card it reads: “We love you very much, Mom. Thank you for adopting us.” It's signed, “All the kids.”

Adoption Day in Michigan

Michigan is celebrating adoptive families and efforts to place children in adoptive homes during the fourth annual Michigan Adoption Day today.

The event is expected to be the nation's largest Adoption Day event for the fourth year in a row.

It is co-sponsored by the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Michigan Supreme Court, and the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange.

Along with the special celebrations today, Gov. Jennifer Granholm has proclaimed November as Adoption Month in Michigan, and the Supreme Court has issued a resolution declaring that today is Michigan Adoption Day.

"Adoptive families have made a loving decision that will pay dividends now and in the future," Granholm said in a written statement. "There is nothing more precious than the growth and development of our youths, who will determine the future direction of our state."

"Michigan Adoption Day is one of the most joyous days of the year with children and adults celebrating the choice of love and to become part of a forever family," said Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow.

"Our new family to family approach to foster children creates a tremendous need for foster and adoptive parents in all communities," said Udow. "Adoption Day provides tangible proof of the joy that forever families create."

Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor said that the celebration should also serve as a reminder of "the many other children who still need permanent homes. For their sakes, we need many more Adoption Days. We hope this event will inspire many good candidates to serve as adoptive and foster parents."

While Michigan Department of Human Services and state courts strive to reunite children with their birth parents, doing so is not always in the child's best interest.

Courts may terminate parental rights in cases of child abuse and neglect.

There are more than 6,100 children whose birth parents rights have been terminated.

About 4,400 of these children have adoption as part of the child's permanency plan.

Many of them have special needs as the result of physical, mental or emotional impairments.

Many children who are waiting for a family are older, members of minorities, or have siblings.

In fiscal year 2005, 2,883 children with special needs were adopted, Udow reported.

Adoption statistics:

- The goal of Michigan's Adoption Services Program is to place children in adoption as quickly as possible following termination of parental rights.

- Whenever possible, adoptive placements are made with families that already have an existing relationship or attachment to the child (relatives and foster parents), and every effort is made to keep siblings together.

- 2,883 children were adopted through Department of Human Services' offices and private adoption agencies between Oct. 1, 2004 and Sept. 30, 2005.

- A relative or foster parent adopted 92 percent of those children.
- 80 percent of children who had siblings in foster care were adopted with at least one of their siblings.
- Preliminary data for fiscal year 2006 indicates that approximately 2,550 children were placed into adoptive homes out of the foster care system between Oct. 1, 2005 and Sept. 30, 2006.
- Today there are approximately 6,200 children in the foster care system whose parents' rights have been terminated.
- For approximately 4,500 of those children, the goal is adoption. The remaining children are either older youths who are satisfied with their placement and do not wish to be adopted (those 14 years of age and older have that option) or youths in other living arrangements where adoption is not appropriate.
- During the four year period that Michigan has celebrated Adoption Day, more than 10,600 children have been placed into adoptive homes out of foster care.
- Many children who are available for adoption qualify for adoption assistance to help families with some of the costs of bringing children into their homes through adoption. Adoption assistance may consist of support subsidy (financial support), medical subsidy (payment for certain remedial services) and assistance with the administrative costs of processing and adoption.
- While not all children are eligible for adoption assistance, for eligible children, adoption assistance may continue to be available until the child turns 18 years of age.
- More than 25,000 adopted children are eligible for ongoing support subsidy.
- Children receiving adoption assistance generally have special circumstances that make finding an appropriate adoptive home more challenging — they may be older children, members of a racial or ethnic minority, part of a sibling group, or have physical, mental or emotional impairments.
- The total amount of adoption support subsidy paid to adoptive families by the state of Michigan is approximately \$208 million annually.

For more information:

- For more information on children awaiting adoption in Michigan go to **www.mare.org**.
- For more information on children awaiting adoption in the U.S. go to **www.adoptUSkids.org**.
- For more information on public adoption policies and data go to **www.michigan.gov/dhs** and click on "Adoption."



Adoption Day nets 5 new homes for children

Overall, program still has many kids waiting to be chosen

PUBLISHED: November 22, 2006

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

If every case in the court system has its own story, then adoption cases may be among the few to feature happy endings.

That would explain why several judges, state officials and human services caseworkers wanted to be on hand Tuesday when five Macomb County families appeared for a public hearing to finalize adoption proceedings as part of the statewide Michigan Adoption Day.

"It wasn't easy for some of the process, but it turned out well in the end, and all the kids are together with us," said Stephanie Harrington of Clinton Township, who along with husband Jeffery completed the adoption of 6-year-old Olivia Thacker and also has guardianship of her two half-brothers, Zachary and Jeremy. "Of course for them, another good thing to come out of it was they could miss a day of school."

"Yes!" Zachary and Olivia emphatically agreed with a high-five outside the courtroom.

The event, now in its fourth year, has involved at least 55 of Michigan's 83 counties and stems from a cooperative effort between the Michigan Supreme Court and the state Department of Human Services. Last year the state completed 274 adoptions statewide and officials expected this year's event would at least meet or exceed 250.

The children at Macomb County Circuit Court ranged from 17-year-old Desiree Lynn Paulk Squire, who takes part in high school swimming and aspired to a career in family law, down to 2-year-old Sean Michael Lamer, who aspired mainly to wave at everyone during Tuesday's proceedings and to make off with a set of the decorative balloons in the courtroom.

Formally adopted on Tuesday were Olivia Thacker to maternal aunt and uncle Jeffery and Stephanie Harrington of Clinton Township; Olivia Green, 11, to foster parents Clyde and Marsha Green of New Haven; Sean Lamer to maternal grandparents David and Anna Lamer; Angel Shock, 2, to foster parents Darin and Jodi Shock of New Baltimore; and Desiree Squire to paternal grandparents Marshall and Diana Squire of New Baltimore.

"This is a fortunate hearing and a fortunate day," said Chief Circuit Judge Antonio P. Viviano, who was on hand for Tuesday's proceedings. "What you are all agreeing to do here is something that is so important in children's lives."

The event is held to promote adoption since past studies have shown nearly 200 children in Macomb County and 4,400 children statewide are waiting to be introduced to new families. State officials have said Tuesday than 10,000 adoptions have been formalized since Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan spearheaded the initiative four years ago, but it is unclear if the program has led to more participation in the adoption process.

Mildred Smith-Roberts, foster care and adoptions coordinator for the DHS offices in Macomb County, said she believes adoptions are up but the problem is far from solved.

"I would say it has increased, but maybe not at a rate to compare with the need. There is an increasing number of children coming into the system in need of families, and every day we

are getting more cases," she said. "So we still have a difficult job ahead of us."

Most children featured in Michigan Adoption Day proceedings came from families of abuse or neglect cases where parental rights were terminated in court proceedings for one or both biological parents. In most cases DHS prefers to place the child with relatives, like aunts and uncles or grandparents, but also frequently relies on foster families with a loving home environment.

One such family, the Greens, said afterward they have been taking in children as foster parents for 19 years and adopted many of them, including Olivia Green's sister Christine, along with raising four biological children of their own. They and Olivia all called the day a happy one and said they planned to celebrate via a visit to Country Buffet.

"She told us one (of her foster brothers) was so excited the other day about her getting adopted, because that meant the buffet was coming," Marsha Green said. "That's sort of become a tradition for us after these things."

Even Circuit Judge Mark Switalski, who officiated Tuesday, had to commend the Greens on their efforts.

"My wife and I adopted three children, and you make me feel like we're part-timers here," he said.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/112206/loc_adopt001.shtml



Michigan adoption facts

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

- The state Department of Human Services finalized 2,883 adoptions from Oct. 1, 2004, to Sept. 30, 2005.
- About 2,550 children were placed in adoptive homes in fiscal 2006.
- Ninety-two percent are adopted by a relative or foster parent.
- Parental rights have been terminated for 6,200 children currently in foster care, and most need to be adopted.
- Eighty percent of children in foster care with siblings are adopted with at least one sister or brother.
- About 25,000 adopted children are eligible for long-term state financial support, with \$208 million paid out annually.
- Many children in foster care were victims of abuse or neglect and suffer emotional problems that are a challenge to overcome.
- For information about public adoption go to michigan.gov/dhs and mare.org.

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published November 22, 2006

Schneider: Woman reflects on life, death of homeless brother

Last December, I wrote about a couple of homeless guys trying to survive the bitter, dark winter nights in a tent pitched near the intersection of Pennsylvania and Oakland avenues.

Their tent got "red-tagged," meaning city officials considered it substandard and uninhabitable, which it surely was.

One of the men was 63 and suffered from emphysema. The second man was 46 and had taken it upon himself to look after the older man. The younger man's name was Greg Helper.

This week, out of the blue, I received an e-mail from Cindy Continenza of Southern Pines, N.C. She wrote to tell me that her brother, Helper, had sprawled out on a local railroad track earlier this year and awaited his death.

"Maybe he had just become too tired to carry on," Continenza wrote. "I will never know. The majority of his life was tormented, and yet I will always remember him with his long swift stride and his genuine smile."

Beyond the surface

But the sister's lengthy e-mail wasn't really about the suicide. It was a tribute to her brother, plus an examination of the complicated relationship that exists between the mainstream and the homeless.

Her words seem particularly appropriate as we approach the feast of abundance and gratitude. Here's part of what she wrote:

"Greg's motivation was always to try to find a job, keep shelter, and have a hot meal - all while being plagued by insecurities, past mistakes, constant financial struggles, alcoholism, a poor upbringing, learning disabilities and social judgment, accompanied by depression.

"Within my two-story traditional, climate-controlled home, I slowly began to explore his world. The friends and people he described were not lazy or unwilling to work but rather lacked the physical and mental characteristics to achieve a normal life.

"As strong as my brother was in survival, he was unable to find enough lasting self-worth to keep a job, a home, a family, a structured life.

LSJ BLOG

Rude and crude

Retail rudeness is rampant and, well ... reciprocal.

I wrote Tuesday about store clerks who leave customers hanging while they take phone calls from maybe-customers. Well, on Tuesday I heard from clerks. Take, for example, shoppers who refuse to get off their cell phones at any point during a transaction.

This being the jolly season, tell me what, in the retail arena, makes you want to assemble a firing squad.

Check out my blog at
http://noise.typepad.com/john_schneider/

They're real people

"He, along with the many other homeless people in our communities, want to be looked at individually. We so often are unable to get past seeing them only as 'The Homeless.'

"I now look at each person whom I suspect is homeless without judgment or speculation, only thinking, 'I wonder what happened?'

"As I look at my brother's picture, handsomely groomed, shaven, and unscarred from his path, I realize no one would ever suspect his fate.

"I choose to remember my brother with admiration and appreciation, as I have learned to look beyond the camouflage of homelessness."

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Include your name, phone number, city or township.

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Article published Nov 21, 2006

Youth, 13, arrested after bringing unloaded gun to school

By Sue Mason
Staff Writer

Wayne-Westland school officials are urging parents to talk to their children about school safety in the wake of the arrest of a 13-year-old Marshall Middle School student who brought an unloaded .25 caliber semi-automatic handgun to school on Monday.

"Students need to act responsibly and so do parents," Superintendent Greg Baracy said. "This very likely prevented a more serious situation. Whenever you put a gun in the hands of a young person, loaded or not, there's the potential for a tragic result. It's always a grave concern for all of us."

The incident happened around 12:30 p.m., after the teen showed another student the gun he had in his pants pocket, according to Westland Police Lt. James Ridener.

The student reported the incident to a teacher and, according to a letter sent home to parents, school administrators and the school safety officer isolated the teen and removed the weapon from his pocket.

"I give that student a lot of credit for acting responsibly and in an adult manner," said Baracy. "The student did the right thing by immediately sharing the information with an adult."

According to Ridener, the teen told other people that he had "bought the handgun on the street for \$75."

"We don't tend to believe him, but as far as we know, it didn't come from the family home," he said. "Whether it's accurate or true, that's open to debate."

The teen was removed from the school by Westland Police, processed and sent on to the county youth home. Because of his age, the matter will be handled through Wayne County Juvenile Court.

The district has a number of security measures in place and, according to Baracy, they worked well in this instance.

"And that's what we hope for," he said.

Bringing a gun to school is in violation of the district's weapons free school zone and the teen will face "appropriate due process," Baracy said.

"It appears from what we know at this time there will likely be a mandatory expulsion," he added.

In the letter sent home to parents, Marshall Principal Robert Van Vulkenberg also asked parents to discuss the danger of handling weapons with children and pointed out that weapons should be "kept under lock in a secure location."

"Parents, number one, need to talk to their children about safety, violence, weapons and what to do if they come in contact with one," Baracy added. "This student acted very responsibly and did the right thing."

WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

Muskegon Co. Prosecutor files criminal charges in case of school vandalism

Stanton Tang

Created: 10/31/2006 5:34:41 PM
Updated: 11/21/2006 10:57:37 PM

Norton Shores - Five teenagers have been charged for the vandalism in October at West Michigan Christian High School in Norton Shores.

Two of the five, Jarrod Brandt, 17, and John Puisis, 17, are being charged as adults. The other three suspects, two 16-year-olds and a teen who just turned 17, will be tried in juvenile court.

The school originally wanted to take care of punishing the students, but prosecutor Tony Tague says he wanted to send a consistent message that there are consequences for criminal acts.

The vandals threw eggs around the school buildings and sprayed fire extinguishers, causing \$20,000 in damage and the cancellation of one day of classes.



 [Click here to play video](#)



Jarrod Brandt



John Puisis

 [Increase Type Size](#)
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Web Editor: [JC Norton](#), Editor

Web Editor: [Brian Nemitz](#), 6pm Producer

Web Editor: [Stanton Tang](#), Executive Producer

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Change Medicaid To Help Home Care

November 22, 2006

Not that you can really put a price tag on it, but national organizations estimate that family caregivers in Michigan provide about \$10.5 billion worth of services each year to relatives who are chronically ill, disabled or elderly. According to the National Family Caregivers Association and Family Caregiver Alliance, Michigan ranks eighth among states in numbers of family caregivers and the hours they give for such things as medical, social, financial and housekeeping services.

This is altogether commendable, and most of the people who do it ask nothing in return.

But the scope of family caregiving -- \$306 billion worth of services nationally, based on 2004 estimates -- and the aging of the giant baby boomer generation raise questions about how effectively this informal system can be sustained.

That's why a statewide program in Vermont -- and similar pilot programs in Michigan -- makes so much sense. Federal officials should follow these and other leads in rewriting Medicaid laws to make home care much more accessible and keep the elderly out of nursing homes and other, more expensive settings.

The Vermont program, called Choices in Care, makes it possible for the elderly to pay friends or relatives \$10 an hour to provide care. In place for about a year, the program addresses the desire of the elderly to stay in their own homes and the shortage of caregivers. It also should be cheaper in the long run.

Michigan's MIChoice program -- being piloted in Detroit, the Upper Peninsula and the Lansing and Battle Creek areas -- does not go quite as far, but its aim is similar. It lets Medicaid recipients make their own choices on spending their long-term care dollars.

But to embark on these sensible programs, Michigan and other states have to apply for cumbersome waivers from the federal government. The Medicaid program, which states administer, was designed when nursing home care was at its height, before doctors and patients learned that the longer you keep folks at home, the healthier and happier they'll be.

Last year, President George W. Bush indicated he knew this when he asked for more home care money for disabled people in his Medicaid budget. But Medicaid should be overhauled to make clear that people with conditions that qualify for institutional care should be able to decide whether to use those same funds to stay at home.

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November 22, 2006

Myths pump up ranks of America's uninsured

Those without health coverage still get decent care

John C. Goodman

About 47 million Americans lack health insurance, according to the most recent Census Bureau report. The annual report is an opportunity for pundits to deplore well, deplore what exactly?

Virtually everyone in the "deploring" business, including during Michigan's gubernatorial campaign, points out that most of the uninsured have low incomes, hoping to invoke our sympathy. But this fact is misleading. Almost every poor person in America is eligible for the federal Medicaid program, and millions of near poor adults can enroll their children in a state children's health insurance program.

Estimates vary, but somewhere between one-fifth and one-third of all the uninsured can sign up for free government health insurance. They can also wait to sign up in a hospital emergency room. In many states people can enroll in Medicaid and get the bills paid several months after the care is delivered. To call such people "uninsured" is a misnomer.

47 million overinflated

To this point, we have been assuming the 47 million number is meaningful. It isn't. Other government reports suggest the true number is as little as half that size. Like unemployment, the condition of uninsurance tends to be temporary. Of those uninsured at any point in time, 75 percent will become insured within 12 months.

But what about people with chronic illnesses who say they can't get insurance? They probably haven't tried hard enough. A 1990 Census Bureau report found that only 1 percent of Americans were denied insurance because of a health problem.

We have since enacted all sorts of federal and state regulations to help the 1 percent. Employers who offer insurance cannot deny it to a new employee because of a health problem. Insurers cannot turn down employer groups because of health problems. Anyone who loses coverage (because of the loss of a job, say) is entitled to get insurance through programs like COBRA.

A better question is: Are they getting health care? At least 100 peer reviewed studies show the uninsured get less health care than the insured. Unfortunately, virtually all these studies are defective -- failing to distinguish those who seek care from those who do not.

A recent RAND Corp. study remedied these defects. Among patients who actually see a doctor, the American health care system delivers virtually the same care regardless of insurance status and regardless of insurance type.

At Parkland Hospital in Dallas, the patients are predominantly low-income. Yet the insured and the uninsured all come through the same emergency room door; all see the same doctors; and all get the same care. Using the hospital emergency room for the delivery of routine care is very inefficient, but thousands of people get their care that way in London and Toronto, just as they do in Dallas.

On paper, the patients in London and Toronto are "insured," whereas many of the patients in Dallas are "uninsured" -- even though they probably are receiving better care (because of less rationing, for example).

Incentives to be insured

So what should we do? We should enact some baby-step reforms encouraging people to be insured, rather than uninsured. Giving people who purchase their own insurance the same tax relief we give to group insurance should be a no-brainer. We should also make it easier for employers to purchase individually owned insurance that people can take with them from job-to-job.

We should stop pouring money into free care and Medicaid systems that encourage people to drop their private insurance and become a burden to the taxpayers. As Gov. Mitt Romney has shown in Massachusetts, charity care funds can be used to subsidize the purchase of private insurance. As Gov. Jeb Bush in Florida and Gov. Mark Sanford in South Carolina have proven, Medicaid funds can be used to encourage private coverage instead of discouraging it.

Finally, we can all promise until next year's Census report, we will put silly ideas aside and think creatively about how to create a better health care system.

John C. Goodman is president of the National Center for Policy Analysis in Dallas. Mail letters to Editorial Page, The News, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or fax to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail to letters@detnews.com.

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Troopers disarm suspect

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

KALKASKA -- A domestic violence call turned dangerous for two state police troopers Monday night when the suspect said he wasn't going to jail and pulled a gun. Troopers Sean Wise and Robert Sekley initially talked with the victim, then went to a camper trailer to talk with the suspect. As they tried to take him into custody inside the darkened trailer, he allegedly pulled a gun and pointed it at Sekley. Sekley struck the suspect in the head with his flashlight as his partner disarmed the man, police said. Aaron Michael Cloutier, 48, of Kalkaska, was arraigned Tuesday on a charge of assault with intent to commit murder and several counts of using a firearm to commit a felony. "Unfortunately, he (Cloutier) did sustain some injury with cuts to the top of his head, but nobody was shot," said Lt. David Street, of the Kalkaska post.

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Former aide must wait to adopt kids

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

A former campaign official for U.S. Rep.-elect Tim Walberg who is facing a child abuse charge must wait until next year to see if he is able to adopt his two foster children.

Daniel A. Coons, 30, resigned from Walberg's staff Oct. 25 after the Citizen Patriot reported Coons pleaded guilty Sept. 18 to domestic violence.

Coons and his wife, Sarah Coons, petitioned Eaton County Probate Court to adopt the two foster children who were removed from their home. A hearing took place Tuesday.

Judge Michael Skinner is set to issue his ruling Jan. 5.

Daniel Coons struck his 9-year-old male foster child in the face and slammed his head into the floor, a state Department of Human Services' Michigan Children's Institute report states.

"Mr. and Mrs. Coons have failed to demonstrate the ability to understand the impact of early childhood abuse and neglect upon a child's development," the report states.

Daniel Coons could face up to two years in prison for third-degree child abuse.

The county prosecutor last week asked a district court judge to throw out the plea deal. That case will be decided Dec. 7.

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Local migrant service office always busy

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

By JAN HOLST

One very busy service organization in Sparta is getting ready to close its doors again.

Kent County Department of Human Services (DHS) Migrant office, 536 S. State St., is a "beehive of activity" from the day it opens its doors in March to late fall every year, said Program Manager Lucia Page.

But later this week most of the program workers will be laid off and Page and her assistant will head back to the central offices at 415 Franklin St. in Grand Rapids.

DHS resource programs available for migrant or transient agricultural workers, who are in the area every harvest season, include referrals for food, clothing, and emergency housing needs, help with transportation, translation, and medical and dental services on site.

DHS migrant offices open annually about March 15, when families are usually already looking for them, said Page.

"I am always the first one here and I see them drive by to see if we're open yet," she said. "And when we do, that morning some families come in."

Families using the services offered always find the office, even though they change.

"Sometimes we see a family back from year to year, but many times they are new to the area," said Page. "It goes kind of in circles, sometimes we will see the same family but not until the second generation."

Page said since each state offers different employment opportunities, migrant families are not always sure where they will end up.

"If their car breaks down somewhere, they may just stay there and find work," she said.

The 2006 harvest was unique for both area growers and seasonal workers. Many of those who usually come to Michigan, stayed to help with Katrina (hurricane) cleanup, leaving some area farmers short of laborers this year.

Other migrant families who often leave after blueberry season to get back before their children start school, stayed on longer in northern Kent and Ottawa counties, because "with the shortage of workers they found work in apples," said Page.

"Growers helped each other out this year by rotating workers anyway they could," she said.

DHS services were also unique this year. The department brought in a dental van about once each month; previously it came for only a few days each year.

"You should've seen it," said Page. "People would line up all day. They would have picnics out in the parking lot, kids would be flying kites, all while they were waiting for service."

"So many of them before just put up with the pain," said Mary Coalter, registered nurse at InterCare Community Health Services. "One day the dentists showed me a whole tray full of pulled teeth. It is hard to say if that was a good day or a bad day."

Also for the first time this season, InterCare was located within the migrant service office. Because it was previously housed inside a medical center, it has been "somewhat invisible" since its beginning 1998, said Coalter.

While Kent County Department of Human Services is there to help all area residents, InterCare is only available for seasonal farm workers and their families.

"InterCare is federally funded with a migrant health grant," said Coalter. "So we have to be careful and screen for agricultural laborers."

InterCare provides visiting nurse services and health screenings to the 160 plus migrant camps in the area and helps clients arrange for local doctor appointments and apply for Medicaid. Care is based on a sliding fee program and includes WIC coupons, health education, immunization checkups, and basically any medical care needed while in Michigan.

"It is really something to find people who have had no or little medical attention because they do not have health insurance," said Coalter. "For instance we found one man who literally suffered for three or four years and not had treatment for his prostrate problems."

The DHS service office may be seasonal, but certainly is a big part of Sparta culture.

(InterCare will remain open year-round.)

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Funds put on debit card

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

By Susan J. Demas

sdemas@citpat.com -- 768-4927

About 15,000 Jackson County families may now receive child support payments via debit cards.

The county Friend of the Court and state Department of Human Services mailed out the new VISA cards this month.

"So many people are accustomed to doing electronic banking already -- it's just another ATM card anyway," said Friend of the Court Assistant Director Karen Robinson.

About two-thirds of Jackson County families already received payments electronically through direct deposit, she said. Parents on direct deposit do not have to switch to the debit card.

The goal is to switch from a paper to electronic system to comply with a new state law, Robinson said. Debit cards already are available in 78 counties. Jackson, Barry, Monroe and Calhoun counties were added this month.

Cards may be used like any other bank or credit union debit card for purchases. They also work at ATMs.

Parents who still want to receive a check may apply for a hardship exemption.

For more information, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs. For problems with debit cards, call 877-464-3324.

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Article published Nov 21, 2006
Social agencies coordinate
Centers combine to save money, provide services

By NICOLE GERRING
Times Herald

Emily Pokorny, 3, once was reluctant to play with other children or talk to people other than her family.

But since March, when she started attending a weekly play group at Algonac Elementary School, the toddler has become more talkative and outgoing.

"She was so shy, she wouldn't play with anybody. She just held onto my leg," said her grandmother, Mary Pokorny of Algonac, who also brings Emily's brother, Thomas, 2, to the group. "I think it's really helped them."

The play group is one of a collection of satellite programs at the school called the Algonac Elementary Neighborhood Project.

The project and a children's center in Sanilac County recently were formed to serve families who previously had to travel to receive services related to children and families.

The centers - both of which opened this year - are examples of how social agencies can better serve the public by going into communities where they are most needed, officials said.

Some are hoping to see more centers created in local municipalities.

How it works

The St. Clair County Department of Human Services and the St. Clair County Michigan State University Extension started the Algonac project in February.

The Community Foundation of St. Clair County provided a \$15,000 grant to pay for a part-time coordinator, Dawn Gower, in Algonac. Space at the school for programming has been donated.

At the school, human-services representatives counsel parents about getting financial assistance and health care. The MSU Extension organizes play groups and workshops on nutrition and parenting.

About 65 miles north, the Kids' Connection of Sanilac County in Sandusky is another regionally based health and human services center.

The Kids' Connection is a building with 23 health and human-service agencies for families in Sanilac County. Agencies at the center include Big Brothers-Big Sisters, Catholic Family Services, MSU Extension, Eva's Place and the Sanilac Literacy Council.

The center is paid for by Sanilac County Community Mental Health, state and federal grants, private contributions and will receive Sanilac County United Way funding in 2007.

It's the first of its kind in Michigan and one of a few in the country.

The center offers a twice-monthly baby pantry where mothers can pick up diapers, clothes, blankets, furniture and equipment such as walkers and strollers. There also is an obstetrician-gynecologist on site, allowing mothers to pick up needed items and get a checkup in the same place.

Ashlee Thomas, 23, of Port Sanilac stops by to pick up supplies for Dawson, her 10-month-old son. Thomas, a single mother who works part time, estimates she spends about \$400 per month to raise her child.

"(Without the pantry), it would be much more of a struggle. I can get a lot of stuff here because it's donated. Otherwise, I would be spending a lot more money," she said.

Kent France, director of the Sanilac County United Way, said his organization agreed to support the center in 2007 because it's efficient, eliminates the duplication of services and encourages members to develop new ways to support children and families.

"It's a really innovative thing, and it's like a magnet for new programming," he said. "To think that all of these agencies didn't protect their turf and came together for one-stop shopping for kids is amazing."

Amy Smith, community planning officer for the St. Clair County Department of Human Services, said community centers work well in rural areas with limited resources and in urban areas that have communities with special needs.

"It's a new creative way to meet the needs in a society where your resources are dwindling," she said. "Why do we each need to be paying overhead when we could be putting more money into services?"

Smith said county agencies send representatives to Algonac because many households in the district are below the poverty line or have incidents of neglect and abuse.

She said she expects the Algonac program to grow this year. It may start offering classes on money management and assistance with dental and mental-health services. The foundation grant is renewable for up to three years.

Smith said officials also would like to build a community center near Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Port Huron.

Paying off

Without the play group at Algonac families like the Pokornys would have to pay for day care or preschool, which means low-income families may not send their children to early-learning programs, said Gower, coordinator of the Algonac Elementary Neighborhood Project.

Emily giggled Monday as she assembled a plastic sailboat with Morgan Adelini, 2, of New Baltimore.

Pokorny said it's hard for children Emily's age to make friends and practice communicating when they're at home all day.

"They're learning how to be with kids and get along with them," she said. "At home, they don't have anybody to play with except each other."

Granholt Still Open To Welfare Time Limit

MIRS, November 21, 2006

Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) said she doesn't have a problem with putting a lifetime limit on people who receive welfare benefits, but she stressed that there must exceptions made for those who have "significant barriers to employment."

Whether welfare reform comes up in lame duck is yet to be seen, but Sen. Bill [HARDIMAN](#) (R-Grand Rapids), the Senate's point-person on welfare issues, has been working well with Department of Human Services (DHS) Director Marianne [UDOW](#) on what a welfare reform package would look like, which would encourage employment and be compassionate.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Concept of aiding poor in American society is feasible and fair

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

BY ROBERT G. FABER

At a forum sponsored by "Learning In Retirement," social problems of racism and homosexuality and ethnicity were considered and condemned, but at the end of the session one member of the audience added the issue of poverty to the mix and asked when this problem would be addressed and what steps might be contemplated for its resolution.

Equating the distress of poverty with the torments of malicious discrimination is an uncommon pairing, but is altogether reasonable and timely. As a group, Americans claim to be, and generally are, a reasonably generous and humane people, honestly concerned for the well-being of their fellows. Unfortunately, our instinctive concentration on matters of "self" - courted and nurtured by a political leadership anxious for continued control - tends to deal more with the tactics of governance than with its desired goals.

As one example of many, political and social conservatives (those with honor, as opposed to greedy opportunists) may reasonably support cutting taxes for the most affluent, on the theory that it will improve economic conditions, thereby helping the poor. An improved economy, they reason, would provide better opportunities for employment and more productive relief programs for the most needy (using what an earlier generation demeaned as "the trickle-down theory" of social assistance). The idea is not bad and may even work, but why this roundabout approach? If the goal is relief for the poor - such as better medical care or more educational opportunities or adequate housing for the homeless and other such benefits - we should concentrate more fully and directly on those goals rather than on the tactics that might get us there.

If, for instance, availability of the full range of medical care for everyone is the issue, that should be Step One and future discussions should concentrate on the best way to achieve that goal. The best approach might include cutting taxes, but it might also include changes in the system of medical care delivery, or adopting a single-payer system of payment (saving billions of dollars), or a more carefully targeted program of tax cuts ... or perhaps a combination of several of these tactics. The point is that our primary focus should be on the target - finding the best path to that target comes later.

There is, of course, the complaint of those less needy (in effect, those who would foot the bill) who insist that we as a society cannot simply ignore the massive costs of supporting those who have not the means to do for themselves. There are limits, after all, to what can be done with available funds. Our country's treasury is already strained and our national debt has sky-rocketed to record levels, so there is simply no way to supply all the humanitarian benefits those Liberal dreamers want to provide. We all feel badly for those most in need, they say, and would like to do for them all that is reasonable, but after a point just giving such costly services to everyone is expensive beyond our country's ability to pay.

That is not all wrong. But enough is wrong to warrant a more careful examination before settling on such clichés. First, of course, we must precisely categorize the "indigent," specifying who should be included in programs of aid (perhaps excluding or limiting those who simply will not work), then determine the precise nature and extent of the aid to be extended. All of which, in keeping with the intent of the Constitution, will have been determined by open debate between the two political parties, those representatives elected by the people to serve them. In any event, it should not be determined as an afterthought by how much money is left over after tax cuts for the most advantaged have been distributed.

And as for the argument that our largesse is limited, I'm inclined to compare social aid for the poor to a highway system available for everyone. If you have a car you are entitled to drive it whenever and wherever desired - at no charge (toll roads excluded). And when potholes reveal themselves, they are repaired - at no cost to the driver. Nor is there a fee for police protection, or for the services of the fire department. These benefits accrue to every individual simply on the basis of being an American citizen in good standing. Clearly those service costs must be borne somehow, by someone. And they are - by gasoline taxes and income taxes and various municipal taxes. Which means that by their very nature they are paid for by those who have the means by which to pay them.

The question, then, is why should these universal and universally accepted benefits be judged differently, distributed differently, and funded differently from the most basic of society's humanitarian services?

This idea - this ideal - seen by some as revolutionary, had become at least a bit more centrist in 1788 when our revolutionaries saw the need to embed it in the Constitution "in order to form a more perfect union (and) promote the general Welfare." Concern for the well-being of all our citizens has become a part of our national identity, an example of who we believe ourselves to be and how we like to represent ourselves to ourselves and to the world. Time, then, to embrace it and work on its implementation.

Obviously this brief representation vastly oversimplifies the extent and nature of the proposal, but the concept remains feasible and fair. And following the path set by our country's founders, whose wisdom and foresight and idealism have made our nation unique in all the world's history, it should be tried somewhere, somehow - and by what more humane citizenry than ourselves.

To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.

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Michigan Report

November 21, 2006

WELFARE CASELOADS CONTINUE CLIMBING

Families receiving cash assistance from the state increased for the sixth consecutive month in October and the Food Assistance Program has crossed the year mark for consecutive increases, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 88,133 cases in October, up from 86,788 cases in September and 85,157 cases in August. The cases represented 238,964 people, up from 235,325 people in September and 230,681 people in August.

October represented 13 months of growth in the Food Assistance Program caseload with 543,328 households representing 1.19 million people. The September caseload was 537,654 households representing 1.18 million people.

But childcare cases dropped for a second straight month to 59,664 representing 112,853 children. September had 60,568 cases representing 116,069 children and August had 63,335 cases representing 121,740 children.

The number of people required to work reporting income fell to 30 percent after holding as 32 percent in August and September. But the percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit increased in September dropped to 10 percent after hovering near 13 percent since October 2005.

Michigan Back With Highest Employment Rate

MIRS, November 21, 2006

Michigan had the nation's highest unemployment rate in October even though unemployment dropped from 6.9 percent to 7.1 percent in September, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Mississippi's unemployment rate is slightly lower than Michigan's (6.7 percent) and South Carolina's is 6.6 percent.

The state's October unemployment rate of 6.9 percent is worse than it was a year ago in October 2005, which is when the state had an unemployment rate of 6.4 percent.

Michigan's unemployment rate was better than Mississippi's in October 2005 right after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and Mississippi had a 9.6 percent unemployment rate and Michigan had a 6.4 percent unemployment rate.

In August 2006, both states were tied at a 7.1 percent unemployment rate and in September 2006, Michigan edged passed Mississippi with a 7.1 percent unemployment rate compared to Mississippi's 7.2 percent unemployment rate.

Nationally, 32 states saw a decline in over-the-month unemployment rates, 12 states saw increases and six states and the District of Columbia didn't have any changes. The largest employment increases were in Texas, Arizona, California, Washington and Florida. The highest decreases occurred in Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina and Virginia.

Over the year, jobless rates declined in 42 states and the District of Columbia, rose in 4 states and were unchanged in four states. The national unemployment rate was 4.4 percent in October, 0.2-percentage point lower than in September and 0.5 point lower than a year earlier.